Jack and the Beanstalk.

MANY years ago, in the wonderful days when King Arthur reigned over Britain, there lived a poor widow with her only son, whose name was Jack. Now, Jack was fond of his mother, but he was very lazy and very careless, and he would not do any work, but spent his mother's money so that she got poorer and poorer. At last she had nothing left but a white cow, and when Jack came home one day from rambling in the fields, he found his mother crying, and then she told him that she had no money left, and scolded him for bringing his mother into poverty. And Jack saw how wrong he had been, and he was sorry, and asked his mother to let him go and sell the cow in the nearest village. So he started off, leading the cow by an halter. Soon after he had started he met a butcher, who asked Jack whether he was going to sell the cow, and offered him a handful of brightly coloured beans in payment. And Jack thought the beans so pretty that he took them eagerly, and gave the cow to the butcher. But his mother, when she saw the beans, burst into tears, and she seized them out of Jack's hand and threw them, with all her force, into a hole in the garden.

"You have ruined us both now," she said, "and there is not even any bread for your supper."

So Jack went supperless to bed, and in the morning he woke up very early. And there seemed a dark shadow across the window, and looking out to see what it was, he saw that the beans had sprouted in the night and had grown up into a thick twisted stalk right up into the sky out of sight. Then Jack made up his mind to climb up and find out what was to be seen at the top. So up he climbed, and he climbed for four hours, and at the end of that time he had got to the top. Then he looked round him, and he saw that he was in a completely deserted country, with not even a tree in sight. And as he was wondering what he should do he saw

a fairy coming towards him with a golden wand in her hand, and a very stern look in her face. And when she got close to him she began to speak to him, and she upbraided him for his cruelty to his mother, till Jack hung his head very much ashamed. "And now," she said, "you may undo the mischief you have done if you follow my directions in everything."

Then she asked him if he knew anything about his father, but Jack answered that he knew nothing, for when he asked about his father, his mother always wept and would tell him nothing. So the fairy told him that his mother was bound by a promise to tell him nothing, but that she was not so bound.

"Your father," she said, "was a very good man, and he was owner of all this beautiful country, which, in his days, was very fertile. But there came a great giant one day and killed your father and took possession of everything he had. And he was about to kill you and your mother also, but because your mother begged so hard for mercy, he let her go free, on condition that she never told you of your father. This promise your mother has kept. I was not able to help your father in his troubles, because I had transgressed one of the laws of fairyland, and was condemned for a time to lose my power. Now I am free, and I will help you. It was I who offered you the coloured beans, and put it into your heart to take them. Now you must go and find this giant and get back your father's land. If you go straight along this road you will come to a house where he lives. Remember that I shall always be by you to guard you from danger, as long as you do well." So saying, she disappeared, and Jack found himself alone on the road. Then he set out walking, and walked along for hours, until, just when the sun was nearly set, and he felt quite exhausted, he came to a large white house.

He knew that this must be the giant's house, and he knocked at the door. It was opened by a small, thin, old woman, and he begged her to

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give him shelter for the night. But she shook her head. "My husband is the giant," she said, "and he would kill you and eat you."

But Jack begged her so hard to take him and hide him, that at last she took him in and gave him bread and butter to eat. And while he was eating it the ground began to tremble, and the poor little woman, shaking with fright, pushed Jack into the oven and shut the door, and just afterwards the giant walked in. "Wife, bring me supper!" he roared.

And she brought him a whole cold sheep, and through a hole in the oven Jack watched him eating it, and saw how he chewed small bones with his great jaws, and threw the large ones away when he had well picked them.

"Wife, my hen!" he then shouted.

And his wife brought a beautiful hen, and put it on the table before him, and he called out, "Lay!"

Every time he said "Lay!" the hen laid a great golden egg, and Jack watched her with eager eyes.

But, after a time, the giant grew tired of playing with the golden eggs, and fell asleep in the big arm-chair. As soon as Jack heard him snoring he seized the hen and darted off as fast as ever he could run, till he got to the beanstalk, and down he slid till he was again in his mother's garden. And the poor woman was overjoyed to see him, for she had been afraid that he had run away because she had scolded him the night before. And when he showed her the golden eggs she was very happy, and the hen laid always golden eggs for them, which they sold and so grew very rich. Jack did not tell his mother anything about the fairy, but after a time he remembered all that the fairy had said to him, and his longing to go once more to the giant's house became unbearable. Then he told his mother that he must go up the beanstalk once more, and she entreated him not to go.

At last, however, Jack could bear it no longer, and getting up very

early one morning he climbed the bean-stalk, and once more he walked along the dusty road until he came to the white house. He knocked at the door, and it was opened by the same woman, but Jack had grown so much that she did not remember him. Then he told her how he had lost his way and was starving, and begged for one night's shelter.

"I took pity on a poor boy once," she said, shaking her head, "and he ran away with my husband's hen that laid the golden eggs, and he has beaten me every day since."

But Jack begged and entreated so much, that at last she took him into the house and hid him in the copper.

Soon the giant came in to his supper. "I smell fresh meat," he shouted.

"It is only a piece of raw meat that the crows brought and left at the top of the house," answered his wife, trembling, and the giant was satisfied.

"Wife, bring me my money bags," he cried, after supper.

And, after a little time, she came back staggering under two huge heavy bags.

"Why have you been so long?" shouted the giant, aiming a blow at her.

"They are so heavy," she answered. "I thought I should never get them up out of the cellar."

Then, grunting and growling, he emptied the bags, first one which contained all pieces of silver, and then the other, which was full of pieces of gold, and when he had counted them all, he put them into the bags, tied them up, and went to sleep.

And as soon as Jack heard him snoring he jumped out of the copper and seized the bags. But, just as he had his hands upon them, a little dog darted from under the giant's chair, and began barking violently. Jack stood quite still with fear, but seeing that the giant did not wake, he threw a piece of meat to the dog, and he made off as fast as he could.

When he got home he could not find his mother, and at last he found her at a neighbour's house lying at the point of death, for she thought that Jack had left her altogether.

And he was sorry then that he had made her so unhappy, and had

not told her that he was going; but when she saw him again the joy made her well, and he showed her the bags of gold and silver pieces that he had brought home.

And for a long time Jack remained at home now happily; but at last the craving to go away came over him again, for the words of the fairy were for ever ringing in his ears.

At last, one morning he got up very early, before the sun rose, for he thought that, perhaps, he could climb the beanstalk and get back before his mother missed him. Each time the journey to the giant's house seemed shorter, and now he got there in about an hour's time, just as the sun was about to rise.

The giant's wife was standing at the door of the house, looking to see if her husband was coming in to his breakfast, and Jack came to her and asked if she would give him something to eat, for he had been out all night. He had so disguised himself this time that she did not recognise him at all. But when he asked for food she shook her head.

"I dare not take you in here," she said. "Twice I have given food to boys, but they have robbed the giant each time, and he has beaten me. Next time he will kill me."

But Jack pleaded with her until at last she could no longer resist his entreaties, but took him in and gave him food; and when she heard the giant coming she hid him under a barrel.

And when the giant came into the house he seized her, and shouted "I smell meat!"

But she said, "There is none in the house."

This time, however, the giant would not be satisfied, but he searched through the house, looking in the oven and in the copper, and once he put his hand on the barrel and Jack quaked with fear; but the giant did not look under it, and at last sat down to his breakfast. And when he had finished he called out:

"Bring me my harp!"

And his wife brought a beautiful golden harp, and placed it before the giant.

"Play!" he roared. And forthwith the harp played the most exquisite

music, which sent him fast asleep, for he had drunk a great deal of wine. The moment Jack saw that the giant was asleep he seized the harp. But the harp was enchanted by a fairy, and when he touched it she screamed :

"Master ! Master !"

And when Jack saw that the giant was awake he ran for his very life. He ran faster than the giant, for the giant was heavy and drunk, and could not run steadily. So that by the time Jack was at the bottom of the beanstalk the giant had only just reached the top, and Jack called out to his mother to bring him a hatchet.

In another minute he had chopped the beanstalk off the ground, and the giant fell headlong to the ground and was killed.

And when the villagers heard how Jack had killed the Giant they were so pleased, that they gave him a beautiful horse with gold and silver trappings, and Jack rode upon it all round the village, and everybody came out of their houses to cheer him and give him presents.

But Jack never went up the beanstalk again, for it withered away, and what became of the giant's wife I cannot tell you, for I have never met anyone who knew.

Mrs. Oscar Wilde.